



GIARDIASIS

What is GIARDIASIS?

Giardiasis is an intestinal illness caused by a microscopic parasite called *Giardia lamblia*. It is a common cause of diarrheal illness. Cases may occur sporadically or in clusters or outbreaks.

Who gets giardiasis?

Anyone can get giardiasis, but it tends to occur more often in people in institutional settings, children in childcare centers, foreign travelers, and individuals who drink improperly treated surface water. Men who have sex with men may also be an increased risk of getting giardiasis.

How is this parasite spread?

The *Giardia* parasite is passed in the stool of an infected person or animal and may contaminate water or food. Hand-to-mouth transfer from contaminated body surfaces or objects, such as toys or diapering areas, also spreads the parasite. Person-to-person spread may also occur in childcare centers where there is close contact between preschool children who have not yet learned good bathroom and handwashing habits.

What are the symptoms of giardiasis?

Most people with giardiasis will not have any symptoms. Others may have mild to severe diarrhea, cramps, bloating and gas. Occasionally, some will have diarrhea lasting for several weeks or months, with weight loss.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms may appear from five to 25 days after exposure, but usually within 10 days.

Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?

People with diarrhea need to be excluded from childcare, food service or any other group activity where they may present a risk to others. Most infected people may return to work or school when their diarrhea stops, if they carefully wash their hands after using the bathroom.

What is the treatment for giardiasis?

Doctors often prescribe medications such as quinacrine, metronidazole or furazolidone to treat giardiasis. However, some individuals may recover without medication.

What can a person or community do to prevent the spread of giardiasis?

- Carefully wash hands thoroughly after toilet visits or changing diapers and before preparing or eating foods.
- Carefully dispose of sewage wastes, so as not to contaminate surface or ground water.
- Avoid consuming improperly treated drinking water.